

Oarsome

aquatic adventures

by Yvette Finlay,

Education Officer, Werribee Open Range Zoo, Australia

Imagine gently gliding along a river in a Canadian canoe past overhanging 200-year-old River Red Gums. As you paddle down the river, you experience a chance spotting of a meandering platypus beneath red, dirt cliffs, which rise over 30 meters above the water's surface. You can experience all these on the Werribee River by taking part in "Oarsome Aquatic Adventures", a schools program developed by educators at the Werribee Open Range Zoo.

The Werribee Open Range Zoo is located on the Werribee River, 4km northeast of the river's mouth. The river has played a major role in shaping the land and providing an interesting landscape, particularly the grazing areas on the flood plain. The source of the Werribee River lies at the base of the Great Dividing Range, within Wombat State Forest, 10km south of Daylesford. The river flows southeast through Ballan, Bacchus Marsh and Werribee over a distance of approximately 110km, then out through its mouth into Port Phillip Bay. "Werribee" is an indigenous Aboriginal term for backbone or spine, indicating its importance to the region.

The Werribee River catchment is an important natural and human resource for Melbourne's western metropolitan area. Werribee River is utilised for recreation such as swimming and fishing. It is also largely relied upon for irrigation of agricultural areas and tourist precincts such as Werribee Open Range Zoo, the Equestrian Centre and the Mansion at Werribee Park. A valuable resource for the Zoo property, the river is utilised by the zoo site for canoe safaris and irrigation.

Human impact

"Oarsome Aquatic Adventures" is an environmental adventure that has been designed to provide participants with an opportunity to focus on rare and endangered species, human impact on the environment, past and present ecology of the Werribee River and the historical and cultural aspects of the Werribee area.

This adventure is experienced in a unique and environmentally sound manner, by touring in Canadian canoes on the Werribee River. The program targets students studying Environmental Science, Biological Science and Outdoor Education in years 10, 11 and 12, but is open to all secondary school students.

The aims of the program are to promote awareness of our waterways and the ecosys-

tems within them and for students to develop an understanding of the appropriate physical, chemical and biological environmental indicators that are used to measure the quality of a river.

We also aim to determine how effective the Werribee River restoration project has been in relation to the following objectives:

- improving the quality of the water within Werribee River at the zoo site
- eradication of introduced species
- creation of habitat through the regeneration of indigenous plants, and- regeneration of populations of indigenous animals.

Safari tour

The program consists of a 2 1/2-hour canoeing and a 50-minute guided safari tour of the zoo. When planning for the tour, you are advised to allow a minimum of four hours for your zoo visit. Students examine water samples taken from the river; hence appropriate fieldwork clothing and sunscreen is desirable.

Prior to launching canoes students are taught basic safety instruction and guided in the basic stroke technique. Once on the water students are briefed on capsizing drills on the water (students do not have to capsize for this drill) and then begin canoe touring and river interpretation led by the guide. Water quality testing for accurate data to send to Waterwatch is also conducted on the river.

Werribee Open Range Zoo provides one experienced staff member for groups of less than 15 students and two staff members for groups greater than 15 students. These numbers are based on the Department of Education and Training and Catholic Education Office outdoor activity guidelines that recommend a ratio of one staff to six students (1:6) when on water. A minimum of two staff should always be present at the activity. Werribee Open Range Zoo can cater for a maximum of 23 students, three staff and two experienced zoo guides.

Teachers can access "Oarsome Aquatic Adventures" zoo resources on line by visiting www.zoo.org.au. These resources contain water quality testing data sheets and Grassland Quadrat survey sheets. These may be used in any waterway or grassland environment close to schools.

Through the support of BHP Billiton and their staff, Werribee Open Range Zoo has been able

Author's contact details:

Yvette Finlay
Education Officer,
Werribee Open
Range Zoo,
Australia



adventure on the
Werribee River

to implement a schools program of environmental significance. Such programs help students to learn that if managed correctly, wetlands can sustain a reasonable demand for agricultural, industrial and domestic water, whilst serving their natural role as a habitat for a large variety of wetland creatures, reducing the impact of floodwaters and maintaining the soil. More recently, there has been an increase in community awareness of the values and needs of wetlands. New approaches to management are being developed and work is being done to rehabilitate damaged and degraded wetlands.

for your information

The documentary film *The Last Journey for the Leatherback?* is available on either video or DVD to teachers and educational organizations for a special discount of \$10 with a free downloadable teacher's kit. A copy can also be downloaded to your PC (sorry, it doesn't work with Macs) for only \$5 (teacher only price for a limited time) and will play as many times as you like. Please send us a copy of the class activity so we can deliver it to the United Nations.

To order a copy of the film go to:
http://seaturtles.org/press_release2.cfm?pressID=220

To download the teacher's kit go to:
<http://www.seaturtles.org/pdf/ACF173.pdf>

Quiz

**? Five animals- what's the connection?
See Editorial for more information**